

Siguniang Shan, a ca 4,950m summit on the long southwest ridge of 6,250m Siguniang). The wall topped out on the ridge, where at 2:45 a.m. on June 8 we intersected a previously climbed route. However, we were unable to follow it to the summit due to time constraints. We climbed the 400-450m wall bolt-free (and in places brain-free) and left behind only a few pegs, nuts, and slings for rappel anchors.

We named our route Suffering First Class and graded it V A3 5.10. However, getting to and back from the route got A6 in my book. I'm entirely to blame, because when our teacher was instructing my classmates to the meaning of "monsoon," I was playing truant and bouldering on the school's wall. As she said, "You can learn things the easy way or the hard way." I made my choice.

As we descended the wall after a 24-hour day, a belay in an expando crack blew, nearly sending me to the valley floor air express. Somehow we got off the wall with all limbs attached, to find out that we were again hijacked by our porters, who refused, halfway through the descent, to take us to the nearest village. This would have meant we were doomed, once again, to miss our flights. For me this included the one back to my home country, Romania. Finally, after a shouting championship, we concluded our 36-hour day in the van taking us to Chengdu's airport. To top it all we received a \$300 fine for not having a climbing permit (which our fixer was supposed to have arranged) and later realized that the porters had lost some of our precious gear. The last mix-up that befell us was that by mistake we ended up flying...first class. Somehow this made for a happy ending.

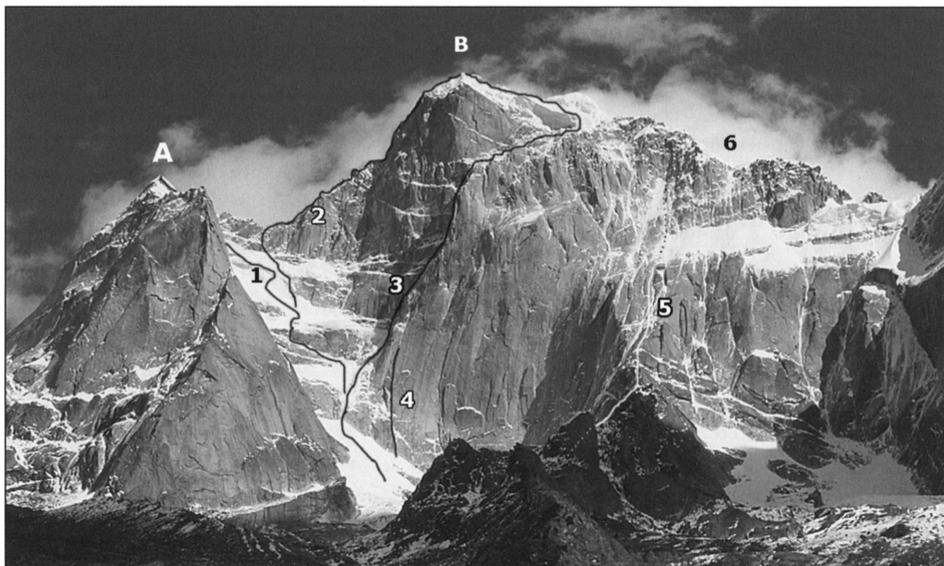
So, I'm writing this report sitting on my Zion haul bag, which I'll be sending this afternoon to Chengdu. And guess where are we headed next Saturday? Yep! But I've heard that in winter it doesn't rain.

COSMIN ANDRON, *Guangzhou, China*

Siguniang, south face to southwest ridge, not to summit; Siguniang North, first ascent, southwest face. I'm at 5,500m. The ice is hard. My crampons rebound, blunted after three weeks. For the last eight years in Haute Savoie the Committee of the French Alpine Club has selected people 16-26 years old for a "young alpinists" group. For two years the young men and women are trained in various aspects of mountaineering by a professional guide, and at the end of this period they organize an expedition. In 2006 the project was a new route on Siguniang (6,250m) in Sichuan, an area still ignored by many Europeans but having exceptional potential.

Our flight landed in Chengdu on October 9. Chengdu is a model of the modern Chinese city, soaked in Western culture. With McDonald's, KFC, Pizza Hut, posters for Oréal, Cartier, Vuitton, Sony, it doesn't correspond to my image of a communist country; the Cultural Revolution seems far away. The city appears to be under construction, with 40-floor apartment blocks. There are many cars: Is Audi the symbol of the new Communism? Is China becoming modernized too quickly? Economists calculate that if the 1.2 billion Chinese had the same amount of stuff as Westerners, there would be no more oil on the planet in 20 years.

The road to Rilong has been greatly upgraded since the Siguniang National Park became a World Heritage Site. In Rilong, Audis are replaced by horses and yaks. The walk to our base camp at 3,500m in the Changping Valley takes four hours. Our site is next to a wooden hut, where two Tibetans live. They have no running water or electricity, just a wood stove. They have a few pigs and yaks, and sell kebabs to Chinese tourists.

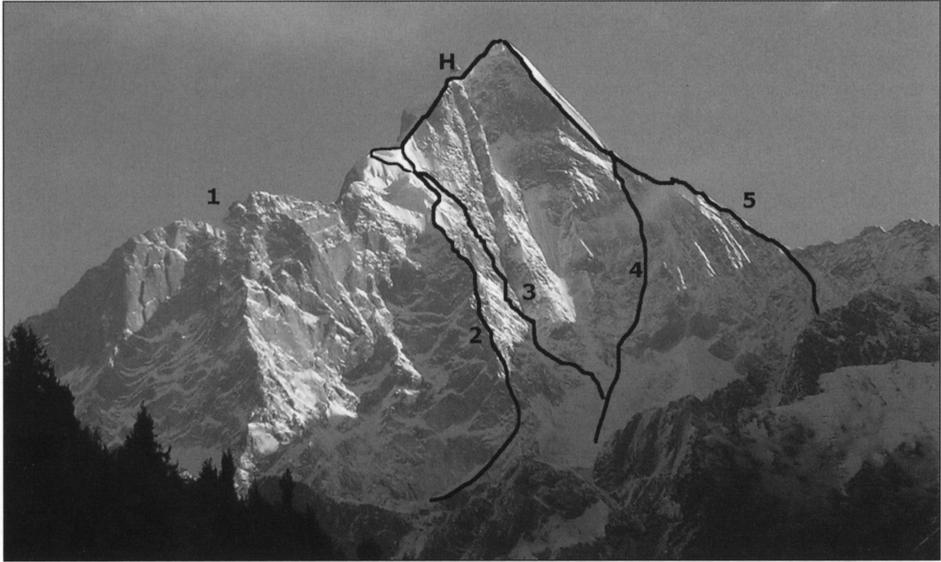


(A) Siguniang North (5,700m) and (B) Siguniang (6,250m) from the west-northwest. (1) Southwest face (V 4+ M4, Batoux-Blair-Bodin-Jacquemond-Rolinet-Valla, 2006). (2) North ridge, used in descent by Fowler and Ramsden after their ascent of the north couloir. (3) North couloir - The Inside Line (WI 6, Fowler-Ramsden, 2002). (4) Northwest buttress attempted in 2005 by an American team. (5) Northwest face, with the proposed line attempted by Americans in 1981 and British in 2004. The solid line ends at the approximate high point of 5,400m. (6) The unclimbed southwest ridge. *Philippe Batoux*

Maile, our translator, has always lived in Beijing and Chengdu, and it is his first time outside a large city. He is so happy to discover the Milky Way and a billion other stars. The pollution in Chinese cities only allows people to see the most brilliant planets. Chengdu and Rilong: two cities in the same China but separated by 100 years.

The mountains of Siguniang are splendid. The peaks are of the most beautiful granite, smooth and compact, a Yosemite Valley with virgin tops between 5,000 and 6,000m. Jérôme Berton, Guillaume Blair, Guillaume Bodin, Clémont Jacquemond, Aurélie Lévêque, David Rolinet, Théo Valla, and I hoped to climb the prominent central couloir on the south face of Siguniang. However, last autumn this gully, more than 1,000m high, was quite dry and the top section completely rocky. Instead, we chose a steep ice line leading out left, up the right side of the rock pillar taken by the eight-member Japanese team, which in 1992 sieged the south buttress and upper southwest ridge to make the second ascent of the mountain. [The French line may be similar to that tried by a Russian team, which attempted a route west of the central couloir but was forced down by stonefall and avalanches—Ed.]

We established a high camp at 5,000m and fixed 500m of rope on the initial difficulties. On October 24 we tried to make a one-day lightweight push to the summit. Leaving camp at 1 a.m., we jumared the ropes and continued on the upper snow slopes, crossing the Japanese Route to reach the crest of the southwest ridge. Here we were slowed by poor conditions. At 5,950m a horizontal rocky ridge, covered in soft snow and impossible to protect, barred the way. An accident at this point would have been serious. Some of the team were already quite tired. It was now 3 p.m. If we continued to the summit, we would certainly have had to bivouac



The south face of Siguniang (6,250m) above the Changping Valley. (1) The long unclimbed southwest ridge. (2) South buttress and upper southwest ridge (Japanese, July 1992, eight climbers led by Chiharu Yoshimura, 600m of fixed rope). (3) The 2006 French attempt, which joined the upper section of (2) and reached a high point H, using 500m of fixed rope. Russians have also attempted a line in this vicinity. (4) South face and southeast ridge (Charlie Fowler, solo, September 1994 in alpine style). (5) Original route via the southeast ridge (Japanese, July 1981, Suita and Sumiya were the first to summit, 2,000m of fixed rope). *Philippe Batoux*

above 6,000m without equipment. I made the decision to go down. The difficulties of our incomplete line, which joined the existing Japanese route on the ridge, were V (WI) 4 M5+.

Four days later we made an attempt on the original 1981 Japanese Route on the southeast ridge, but more bad snow and cold forced us down from 5,600m.

We returned to base camp for a new objective, Siguniang North (5,700m). At 2 a.m. on November 1 all except Berton and Lévêque left the camp at 4,500m and started up the southwest face. This is the open snow and ice slope left of (and opposite) the northwest face Siguniang and was partially followed in descent by Mick Fowler and Paul Ramsden after their successful ascent of the stunning north-facing couloir, The Inside Line.

The face was granite flagstone, covered by a 5cm layer of snow and ice. The ice was good. The climbing wasn't difficult, but we couldn't protect ourselves. Higher, a mixed section, followed by a short vertical ice wall formed by a bergschrund, led to the summit slopes. A ridge led to the highest point. Our joy at being the first to reach this summit was immense. The difficulties of our route were V WI4+ M4.

On our way back to Rilong, we detoured to look at the Shuangqiao, the parallel valley west of the Changping. This valley is famous for its icefalls: more than 50 higher than 400m. Most end up at 5,000m. These lines were not in condition, but there was another surprise. Less than a day's walk from the road we saw several granite walls at least 1,000m high, major objectives to justify many trips to this land of pandas. This is the new Eldorado, and I believe part of alpinism's future development will take place on these walls.

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